above MSL) with an ancient temple of Biligiri Rangaswamy at the summit, is a very famous pilgrimage centre. It forms the main tourist attraction of Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Wildlife Sanctuary covering an area of 539.52 sq. km.

As a part of the survey on the status and distribution of yellowthroated Bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus* (Jerdon) Dr. S. Subramanya and J.N. Prasad visited the B.R. hill ranges between 22-25 December 1990. During the survey, likely habitats in the sanctuary were visited, but the species was neither sighted nor was it heard.

On a subsequent visit to the Sanctuary, on 16 August 1992, we were birdwatching in the forests below the sheer rock on which the temple is situated. We were watching a pair of Shahin Falcons *Falco perigrinus perigrinator* Sundevall circling overhead and then fly past the rock face, when suddenly, the characteristic calls of the *P. xantholaemus* were heard. We traced the call to be coming from the densely foliaged *Ficus* which was growing amidst the crevices on the rocky escarpment below the temple. We waited with curiosity to have a look at the birds to confirm their occurrence, but to no avail. Our excitement was further dampened by the rain and we had to return without seeing the birds.

The next visit was on 6 October 1992. We were keen to see the bird and so concentrated our efforts on the area where we had heard *P. xantholaemus*. Our strategies yielded good dividends and as in the first visit to the area, we heard the birds. Within few minutes a pair of *P. xantholaemus* emerged out of the *Ficus*, when we had a good look at the birds and confirmed their identity. From the *Ficus*, the birds flew up to the small bushy trees on the vertical rock face and were seen catching some insects. Later they flew across on to the other side of the hill and we lost sight of them. A flock of three Redvented Bulbuls *P. cafer* and Redwhiskered Bulbuls *P. jocosus* were seen foraging in the vicinity.

The habitat where *P. xantholaemus* was sighted had dense vegetation comprising of a few trees of *Citrus maxima* along with *Ricinis, Schefflera, Sterculia, Acacia coccinea,* and *Lantana* which formed the edge of an old plantation.

Our sighting of *P. xantholaemus* happens to be the first report of the species for this area. Although the entire B.R. hills range was surveyed by the late Salim Ali during his survey of erstwhile Mysore state (Ali 1942, *JBNHS* 43, 44), he did not come across the species. Even R.C. Morris (1894-1977) an avid sportsman-naturalist, who spent most of his active life in B.R. hills range (Honnamatti Estate), failed to come across the bird.

P. xantholaemus has seemingly a disjunct but a wider distribution than hitherto accepted.

June 12, 1993

S. KARTHIKEYAN
24, Opp. Banashankari Temple, Shakambarinagar, 8th Block Jayanagar P.O., Bangalore 560 082.
J.N. PRASAD
T.S. SRINIVASA
C/o Merlin Nature Club, 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main, J.P. Nagar I Phase, Bangalore 560 078.

21. A NOTE ON BAYA, *PLOCEUS PHILIPPINUS* NESTING ON KRISHNACHUDA (*DELONIX REGIA*) TREE

During my tours, during August 1990 while I was at Haflong (Assam, c. 25° N, 93° E), I came across a krishnachuda tree (*Delonix regia*) on which a large number of Indian baya were nesting. The tree was standing within the compound of a house. Moreover, there was a small Assam type building around the stem of the tree. The tree was on Garampani-Diyungbra road and about 7 km from Diyungbra.

I had never seen Indian Baya nesting on krishnachuda and that too within a compound of a house.

As I knew the nearest colony site of Baya on a betelnut grove about 20 km away on Diyungbra-Lanka road, I went there and found that the betelnut grove had been felled and cleared. A few Bayas had constructed nests on a lone betelnut palm. A few others on a phoenix palm. There were some nests on

a Sirish (*Albizzia* spp.).

Except the *Albizzia*, all other trees were standing within compounds. The number of nests on the krishnachuda tree were more than a thousand.

September 6, 1993

K.K. GUPTA

40 A, Central road,

Calcutta 700 032.

22. THE MYSTERY OF "MASS SUICIDES" BY BIRDS

The ornithological catastrophes at Jatinga, Haflong and other remote areas of Assam have been known as far back as I can remember, though the first written record of the mass suicide of birds I can trace is by Salim Ali (1962) when he made a trip to the area with E.P. Gee. This was as a preliminary examination of possible sites for the capture and ringing of migratory birds. The same trip is referred to by Gee in his chapter on the Bird Mystery of Haflong in the WILDLIFE OF INDIA (1964) and to another place in the Cachar Hills by Rao and Zoranthanga (1979).

All required identical atmospheric conditions:

1. Dark nights, overcast with fog or mist and a little drizzle.
2. Gee added the additional information that the light at which they were caught had to be round and circular and not beamed like the light from an electric torch or the headlights of a car and the remains of birds which had been killed or caught were all of species resident in the area.

Then Sunjoy Monga and U. Rane (1986) visited the recently established holiday camp at Malshej Ghat on the edge of the Western Ghats with a party from BNHS and found a lot of resident birds hitting the eastern side of the bungalow and killing themselves by breaking their necks, legs or wings and allowing themselves to be captured by the locals for being eaten or for sale.

Except for a newspaper report by Chandrakant Dixit (1984) of a trip by Dr. Sengupta of the Zoological Survey of India, Monga was also the first observer to visit such a place when so many birds were killing themselves. He referred to a high wind and was able to obtain dead or wounded birds some of which were brought to Bombay for identification. The places in Assam had been visited by the observers some time after the birds had killed themselves. There was much guess-work, but all along there appeared to be little doubt that though Salim Ali was still considering the capture and ringing of birds under these circumstances he had no evidence of any migrants being caught under these conditions. Though ducks and geese were seen at Haflong a little later, these were not birds getting captured at lights and there is reference only to flights high up in the sky going south. While writing of the same place after a joint trip with Salim Ali (Gee 1964) refers to birds going north. There seems to be little doubt that the movements are local and have nothing to do with migration on a large scale as has been believed all along.

All the birds captured both in Assam and Malshej were locally resident birds which must have moved short distances and the new factor of a high wind suggested cyclonic conditions further supported by the deep, long valley on one side and the high pinnacles on the other. Lavkumar Khacher (1978) refers to a teal so captured no doubt being forced down by the wind. Sunjoy Monga has drawn attention to several species obtained at Malshej which have been listed as Migrants and obtained apparently in breeding condition. The clause on my Checklist (1981) which states that the term migrant relates to the Konkan appears to have been overlooked, and it is possible that some of them nest east of the Ghats in the Deccan.

I also visited Malshej Ghat the same year (1984) with Sunjoy Monga and there is little doubt that a high wind was blowing for as we drove up the ghat road and were nearing the top, a stream which flowed down the side of hill and passed under the road was lifted off its bed and flung across the road on to the top of the car!

We have read or heard of hundreds or thousands